Genesis 2:4-3:24 – “Creation and Fall”

We come now to the second scene of creation in Genesis. Here we have the origin of human beings in their relation to God, to the world, to the animals and, ultimately, to the problem of good and evil. This section begins with a word which has the same root as the opening word in the Babylonian creation account. We also have similar motifs from other ancient literature like the Gilgamesh Epic. Yet the world view of the biblical writers could not be more different from the mythical outlook of these earlier sources. It is important to note the differences because they give us an important insight into the essential contrast between the Word of God and the wisdom of the world (I Cor. 1:20-23). This passage answers two essential questions: where did we as human beings come from, and why is there suffering and evil in God’s “very good” world (Gen. 1:31)?

I. The creation of “Adam’ (“Man”) – 2:4-17
   a. This is a different version of the creation than we found in chapter one. As we mentioned in the first study, Genesis is not offering us a description of the origin of life. It is giving us a *definition,* telling us what is the purpose and meaning of life. Also, it is presumably being written down during the Babylonian captivity of the sixth century B.C., against the backdrop of the religious teachings of Babylon and the surrounding world.
   b. In chapter two, the priority is on the creation of human beings, which was presented in just two verses in chapter one (1:26-27). Here, God creates Adam before the creation of any of the plants. Adam is created from the dust of the earth. In the Hebrew, there is a play on words since “Adam” is very similar to the word for soil or ground (“dama”). The mention of the rivers locates the setting near the Persian Gulf, in other words, in an identifiable part of the Babylonian Empire.
   c. Adam is specifically created when God breathes into him “the breath of life” and he becomes a “living being’ (2:7). This is important because it underlies the unified nature of humanity. Unlike the Greeks, who saw human beings as immaterial souls imprisoned in physical bodies, the Bible shows that all of humanity – physical, emotional and spiritual – comes from God. This amplifies the idea of chapter one that we are all made in the image of God. The implications of this are important since everything we are in our humanity therefore represents the image of God in us. All our thoughts, feelings, needs, desires and gifts originally come from our creator.
   d. God places Adam in the Garden of Eden. This garden is a special creation. Adam now encounters the first major mystery of creation. God establishes boundaries. All the fruit of the garden is for Adam’s use and enjoyment with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While the origin of goodness is presented in the creation story, especially throughout the first chapter (vv. 12, 14, 18, 21, 25, 31), we

have no information about the origin of evil. This led Augustine to conclude that evil is not a "thing" in itself. Rather, it is the absence of good (as cold is the absence of heat). This view has not been universally accepted.

II. The creation of Eve – 2:18-25
    a. God says that "it is not good that the man should be alone." This underscores the point that humans are social beings. We are created to be in community. This is why loneliness is one of the most painful experiences we can ever encounter. Throughout both these accounts, the importance and dignity of humanity is affirmed. This is very different from the Babylonian Creation view where humans are created for the sole purpose of serving the gods.
    b. God will create "a helper as his partner." This helper is not to be subservient or a lesser being but rather one who will be a partner for the man. This view is to be distinguished from the later Greek view that women were inherently inferior to men.
    c. We next have the scene of Adam naming all the animals. This establishes Adam's special status in creation. Yet none of the animals can serve as his partner. In other words, a dog may be "man's best friend," but he cannot be his partner.
    d. God now causes a deep sleep to fall on Adam. This signifies that Adam is not able to define, much less create, his partner. God does not consult with Adam regarding a suitable partner. God will create the partner. Adam is completely passive in this process.
    e. God takes one of Adam's ribs to create Eve who will be "the mother of all living" (3:20). This is a title similar to that of the ancient goddess, Inanna. The point of Genesis, however, is that while Adam and Eve are the first humans, there is nothing divine about them. In fact, the desire to become "like god" will be the origin of sin and evil. God next brings the woman to the man. Now for the first time we have the words for "male" and "female." "Adam" can be taken to mean humanity in general.
    f. Adam recognizes a counterpart in the partner God has created. She is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. The writer then adds the explanation of why a man leaves his father and mother clings to his wife. They become one flesh. They are naked and not ashamed. This is to affirm the fundamental goodness of sexuality as God originally designed it. In the Babylonian myths, nakedness symbolizes vulnerability as well as sexuality. Here, the unselfconscious nakedness of Adam and Eve symbolizes their innocence.

III. The Fall – 3:1-24
    a. In the opening scene of chapter three, we are introduced to the serpent, who is "more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made." The serpent clearly then is part of God's creation. Yet the serpent opposes the Word of God. This is our first introduction to

opposition to God's will. How the serpent comes to be this way we are not told. According to Jesus, Satan was a sinner and a murderer "from the beginning" (I John 3:8; John 8:44).

b. The serpent is a personification of evil. He speaks and, at this point, does not crawl on the ground. The figure of a "serpent goddess" was a familiar one throughout the ancient world. This would describe the sea serpent Tiamat in the Babylonian creation myth. The serpent was already seen as a figure who frustrates humanity's plans. In the Gilgamesh Epic, Gilgamesh finds the magic plant which gives eternal youth only to lose it to a serpent. The idea, however, of a talking animal, so familiar to us in fairy tales, apparently occurs here for the first time. The point needs to be stressed that evil, and in particular, Satan, is often presented in Scripture in mythical or symbolic terms. Satan is described as both a serpent and a dragon (Isa. 27:1; Rev. 12:9; 20:2).

c. The symbolism of the serpent certainly reveals the character of Satan:
    i. The serpent begins by asking a question, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" God never said this.
    ii. Eve correctly states God's terms. They could eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Presumably the reason for this was that by eating the fruit of *that tree* a person participated in evil.
    iii. The serpent now contradicts the Word of God: "you will not die." The serpent then offers the lie that by eating the fruit Eve and Adam will "be like God."
    iv. Eve responds to the serpent's lie. She now looks again at the fruit. She sees that the tree
        1. was a delight to the eyes
        2. was desired "to make one wise"
    v. This is a perfect description of sin. Terence Fisher said that if evil were ugly it wouldn't be a problem (When Fisher filmed *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* he made Hyde dashing and attractive rather than ugly and monstrous).

d. Eve takes the fruit, eats it and gives it to Adam "who was with her." In many of the ancient myths, women would use sexuality to seduce men to do their will. There is no suggestion of that here. Unfortunately, the myth of women in general being treacherous seductresses does get picked up later in church history. Even when scripture does speak of seductive women, it makes it clear that this is only a very limited kind of woman (the "strange woman" of Proverbs 5). In the Gilgamesh Epic, which would have been widely known in this culture, a prostitute seduces a man who lives only with animals in order to give him wisdom. The Biblical account gives a totally different picture.

e. It is often assumed that the eating of the forbidden fruit is the fall. Yet part of this rebellion is what follows when Adam and Eve try to hide from God. They see their nakedness now as a cause of shame and sew

together fig leaves and loincloths to cover themselves. They cannot, however, cover up their sin.

f. The rich symbolism of this account continues with the picture of God "walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze." God, of course, knows what they have done and confronts them.
g. In a very illuminating sequence, Adam and Eve (like us) refuse to take responsibility for their actions. Adam blames Eve and, by implication, God ("The woman whom you gave to be with me"). Eve blames the serpent.
h. God is not fooled (Gal. 6:7). He holds Adam, Eve and the serpent all accountable. The serpent will crawl upon the earth. The woman will experience pain in childbirth and be ruled by her husband. Man's work will become burdensome and hard. All of this is the curse of sin. The goodness of God's creation has been tarnished, not by God, but by the rebellion of those whom he created.
i. It is inevitable and fitting that Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden. We now learn of a tree of life which they will be prevented from approaching. Death will be their fate as God had warned (2: 17).
j. The word of hope in all this is God's promise in 3:15. The seed or offspring (descendent) of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. The serpent will strike his heel. Apparently, if one is bitten by a poisonous snake in the heel, there is a better chance of survival since there are fewer blood vessels in the heel than in other parts of the body. To be struck on the head, however, is fatal. This is the first prophecy of the coming of Christ in the Scriptures. Jesus will drive out the ruler of this world (John 12:31). He will destroy the devil and his works (Heb. 2:14; I John 3:8). It is significant to note that, as important as the theme of Christ being the sacrifice for our sin is, the first mention of the atonement in Scripture focuses on Jesus' victory over Satan.

Questions for us –

1. What do we learn about the nature of ourselves in this passage? Why is it important to realize that all of us receive the breath of God (the word for breath is the same for "spirit")?
2. What do we learn from this passage about the nature of men and women? How does the theme of "a partner" relate to unmarried persons? What do we learn from this about the nature of human community, especially the community of the church?
3. How do we apply the lessons of sin and temptation in these chapters to ourselves? What are some of the ways that sin offers us the false promise of "delight" and "wisdom?" How can we recognize the voice of the serpent today in our world?