

## **Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 3A, The Garden Story**

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This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews in his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session 3A, The Garden Story, Part 1, Genesis 2:4-3:24.

Session 3 is The Garden Story. Under the superscription of the generations in chapter 2, verse 4, the garden story reaches chapter 4, verse 26. Another way to understand the garden story is in terms of the content, so that chapter 2, verse 4 through the end of chapter 3, verse 24, these two chapters concern events inside the garden. Chapter 4, verses 1 through 26, pertains to what becomes of the human family outside the garden.

So, let's first speak of how chapter 2's account of creation is related to chapter 1. I had said on an earlier occasion that chapters 1 and 2, the two creation accounts, are complementary, and the relationship is one in which the general creation is specified with reference to the sixth day when the human family was created by God in his image. So, when we look at the superscription of chapter 2, verse 4, you will find that it shows the echo of chapter 1, verse 1. Let me proceed by looking at chapter 2, verse 4. This is the account of the heavens and the earth, or we might say the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. So notice this is the language that you will find in chapter 1, verse 1—continuing when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

So, we will notice that there's a parallel with the beginning verse, and then we will find a parallel between what we discovered in chapter 1, verse 2, and chapter 2, verses 5 and 6. In chapter 1, verses 2 and following, you'll notice and remember that chapter 2, verse 2, described what the earth was like before God said in verse 3, let there be light. What we learned was that the unproductive earth, and then the unfilled, uninhabited earth, was not conducive to supporting human life. And so, the first three days, God addressed how the earth was unproductive, but yet on day three, it produces vegetation.

And then days four, five, and six reflect an uninhabited earth, but God filled up the creation in days four, five, and six with birds in the air, and you have fish of the sea, and then the land animal on the sixth day, and then the human family. But the contrast would be between verse 2 and verse 3. In verse 2, if you recall, we had three clauses, three descriptions of the circumstances at the time of God saying, let there be light. And in the first case, we had that description of the earth that was formless and empty.

And then there was the seawater. And third, although there was this, for just casual talk, chaos, it was circumscribed by the presence of the management by the Spirit of God. And that would be your third description.

When it comes to chapter 2, verses 5 and 6, similarly, we have three circumstances that are described before God said in verse 7, or rather that the narrative says in verse 7, the Lord God formed the man. This was necessary in order for there to be a working garden that would produce the vegetation that would sustain human life. The first circumstance is that in verse 5, no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth.

And second, no plant of the field had yet sprung up. The third is found in verse 6, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. In between verses 5 and 6, or at the end of verse 5, we have the reason expressed why there was no plant.

This is because the Lord God had not sent rain to the earth, and there was no cultivator. There was no gardener to work the ground. And so, God sets about to reverse those circumstances and to produce a cultivator, and then the cultivation of the garden.

For example, verse 15 of chapter 2 says, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Now, what are some of the differences between chapters 1 and chapters 2 to 4? And that is, why is it advantageous for the storyteller to give us two accounts of creation? Well, in Genesis chapter 1, there's an emphasis on symmetry, the organizational principle of these six days plus one, the seventh day. So that tells us that God was a great designer and that he was progressively aiming at a goal that he achieved.

We have the recurring formulaic language. For example, the best one to recall is there was evening, there was morning, and then the first, second, and third day. Also, you'll remember that in chapter 1, there's a universal setting.

It's cosmic in its description, and there's a very rapid pace as we move from day to day as readers. Also, the name of God, Elohim, just simply translated God, the Hebrew word Elohim is spelled E-L-O-H-I-M. This name for God has been typically understood as emphasizing, as we find here in this chapter, the idea of deity and divinity.

And in this chapter, the almighty, all-powerful God who speaks and produces the universe. And then the technical language that is used, for example, the word create, in this word in Hebrew is b-a-r-a, b-a-r-a, b-a-r-a, which is used in the Old Testament when God is the subject so that it can be taken as a special language referring to

what God does, God creates. Then, the word, for example, image, again, must be very specified, clear technical language that has to be explained and interpreted.

Last time when we talked about the image of God, you'll recall that we were talking about how God created man and woman in such a fashion that there was a sharing, the possibility of a sharing on a relational basis, and that God has personhood, and that men and women have personhood. Now, when I talk about person, how men and women are persons, and God is a person, I do not want us to conclude that God is exactly the same as we are persons. It's language person that helps us, by analogy, understand that He is a being, a personal being, an animated living being, not just a principle, not just it, not just a force, none of those things, but a personal being.

When it comes to drawing analogy, this is the only way God can communicate effectively to us because we are finite, and we have limitations, whereas He is infinite without any limitations. So, when it comes to making equations, the reason why we can make equations by comparing things to things is because we know both sides of the equation. So, here's an example where we have, say, a yellow ball, and then there is the sun, which is yellow in its general character, and so we know both sides of the equation, and we can see some analogy between the two, the sun and then a yellow ball.

But when it comes to God, we only know one-half of the equation, and that is human experience and knowledge. We are limited to what God is in His entirety, all that we could possibly know about God. God makes known the most essential things about Himself so that we will be able to enjoy that special relationship we have with our Creator.

So, we can know the mind of Christ, we can know the mind of God, our Creator, and His Son personally, but only because God has chosen to reveal that of His mind. So, we have that, but we don't have all of His mind. Now, when it comes to chapters two and four, we find quite a contrast, whereas in chapter one, there's an elevated prose, and chapters two through four, we will find suddenly a familiarity.

It's very earthy. It's a story with a narrative plot with participants, with direct speech and indirect speech, cause, and effect change that you typically see in a narrative plot, and it's highly processional from this event and then its consequence or outcome. Then, you will find that the garden is a local setting versus the universal setting, which is cosmic.

Then there is a slow, focused pace on the sixth day. Now, what is striking about chapter two with its verse four, its superscription is that we have another name for God that is coupled with the name found in chapter one, God, Elohim. This is found in chapter two, verse four, where the word LORD is noted.

Also, this is important, as it's in small caps. Every time you find in your reading of an English translation in the Old Testament, where you have the small capitals, L-O-R-D in caps, that is a translation of a Hebrew word that is special, that is unique, and that is the Hebrew name, Yahweh. I'll spell it Y-A-H-W-E-H.

Yahweh is identified in the Old Testament as the covenant God of Israel. And he goes by this name, which he has revealed, and he has explained the importance of the name Yahweh. You will find this in Exodus, and you will find it, for example, in Exodus chapter three and Exodus chapter six, as well as Exodus chapters 33 and 34, where the name of Yahweh is explained.

Now, this does not mean that the name Yahweh was unknown before the time of Moses, but rather that the name was more fully understood and explained in the time of Moses. So, as early as chapter two, verse four, the name Yahweh occurs. Also, importantly, the last verse of chapter four reads that at that time, people or men began to call on the name of Yahweh, meaning that there was a commonplace worship of God under and by the name Yahweh.

Also, in chapters two through four, you'll find that it's a non-technical, common conversational kind of language, and there are a number of word plays. This is where language is used to heighten the meaning of what is described. And a very good one, of course, would be found in one you already probably know, and that is found in chapter two, verse 23.

The man said, this is now bone of my bones, referencing the woman, Eve, and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called, and I'll mispronounce it to make my point, woe man, for she was taken out of man. So, there is a play showing in English, and it's fortunate you can do this in English, that there is a unity, a connection between the woe man and the man. In Hebrew, you hear it, the word for woe man, woman, in Hebrew is ish, shah, ish, I-S-H, ish, and then shah, S-H-A.

And the word for man here is ish, ish, I-S-H. So, those are the kinds of word plays that will occur often in Hebrew narrative, and this is just one example. So, when you take together, chapter one testifies to the almighty authoritative word of God, who is totally separate, totally different than creatures, than creation, and then how he has designed creation to sustain human life, and how he has made human life with the capacity to relate to him as persons, and that there is a celebratory seventh day, a day when there is a day designated holy, given holy and completely in worship and celebration of God's creation.

When you take that together and contrast it with chapters two through four, you have the complementary idea of covenant commitment on the part of God. We will find that the creation and the man, of the woman, have this capacity to enjoy God's good gifts of creation, especially that garden, and that there is a special communion

that God has with humanity and not what we find in the creatures, other creatures. I should also point out that as we pursue chapters two and three, there's a difference in chapter two, where there is a harmony, a community of God and mankind, mankind and how there is within mankind a harmony between the woman and the man, and then how there is also a peace between the man and the woman, humanity, and the creatures of the garden.

This will sadly be disrupted as a result of what we find in chapter three, and that is the disobedience on the part of the man and the woman. Now, things are broken down in these harmonious relationships. We'll discover that this all-important, most important relationship is fractured when all of creation obeys the word of the Lord in chapter one, and it was so, and it was so, and it was so.

But in chapter three, we find that humanity chooses to disobey the Lord, and so there is a broken relationship. God has a creator relationship with all of his creatures, all humanity. But what we're speaking of here is a relationship that is provided for and will be recovered through and on behalf of humanity by God himself.

And so, we know as Christian readers, this is achieved through God in the Lord Jesus Christ, who reconciles us to God and repairs, but it exceeds even the relationship that first broke down between our first parents and that of God. Also, in chapter three, we will find that there is a brokenness within the human family. In the oracles of judgment, which we'll read in a few moments, there is strife, a battle between the woman and the man.

And this is found for us in chapter three, verse 16. On an earlier discussion last time, we talk about the battle between the woman's offspring and the serpent's offspring in chapter 3:15. So, the serpent representing the animal world, you see there's a fracture, there's a breakdown in that peaceful coexistence between the man and woman and the other creatures of the animal world.

Now there's a looking, we can look together then as I work through the description of the creation of the man. But first, just notice that there is an emphasis on narrowing the garden and the creation of its cultivator. You'll notice in verse five it uses the description, had yet appeared on the earth.

Now, this word earth can also be translated as land. And I think that what well may be occurring here is that we move from the earth to the land and God had not sent rain on the land. Here rendered earth in the new international version, but we move from earth to a particular land that's now described.

And the reason why I speak of this as land is because it speaks in verse six of the ground, but streams came up from the land and watered the whole surface of the

ground. So, we move from earth to land. And then, if you look at verse eight, now the Lord God had planted a garden in the East in Eden.

So, this garden is in a region in an area that is identified as Eden. This will become close or clear. If you look at verse 15 again with me, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden.

So, this is a garden that appears in Eden. We move from Earth to land to Eden, and then the specific garden, within the region of Eden, becomes arable because it has a good water source that we find in verses 10 through 14. So initially, there were the streams, and there could be translated mist.

This would be, perhaps; we don't know with certainty, subterranean waters that provided some water for the land section. Within that, Eden will have rivers in this region, which are identified in verses 10 through 14. Two of these rivers we know are the Tigris-Euphrates, which would be in Southern Iraq, where these two rivers come together in Mesopotamia.

The other two rivers we don't know, Pishon and then also Gishon. Pishon and Gishon, this rhyming couplet, we don't know of them. And it may be designed as a literary means of saying here are two ancient rivers that are no longer recoverable.

But it does help us to understand the general region where the garden was found. And we know from our recoveries archaeologically and also what we know of geological history that the center of civilization was in the Mesopotamian Valley.

Now, let's talk about the creation of the man in verse 7. In verse 7, we have language that depicts God in a highly anthropomorphic fashion.

In other words, he is describing God like we would describe a human being. So, in verse 7, we are told that the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being. First of all, the word formed is the word that is used by a potter who shapes clay into pottery.

And so, you have a highly anthropomorphic, intimate description of God who is hovering over the creation of the man using the ground dust and shaping it into the form of a man. Now, because there is this stream, it may best be understood that this was not dust like powder, but rather with the soil, and then the surface waters, clay, and mud could be shaped and formed. Then, we are told that God, hovering over the clay figure, breathed the breath of life.

This is the power source of life. And so, by this in-breathing, the figure becomes animated, alive. So, you have here suggested that we have an animate and an

inanimate when it comes to God's creation so that we have the body and then the human spirit.

And the body and the human spirit become alive. And therefore, the consequence is that man became, and that word became is important in our translation, a living being. That word, being in our translations, traditionally became a living soul.

The Hebrew word that is translated being in the New International version and many other versions is the word nephesh. Nephesh. And I'll spell that for you. N-E-P-H-E-S-H. N-E-P-H-E-S-H. Nephesh.

And when you do a study on the word of nephesh, you will discover that the word is broader in meaning and use than the word soul. The reason why being is a better rendering is because the word nephesh can refer to the whole entity, the whole person, not just the immaterial. The soul may be suggestive of simply the immaterial and does not take into account the body.

One of the problems with the soul is it may be misunderstood by our contemporary readers as an eternal principle, an eternal being, such as we find in Greek philosophy that understands the soul as a derivative of the universal God, the universal soul. In the Bible, however, we must understand that the soul is not understood in that way, but rather the biblical idea is a person's whole being. For example, there are in those passages where you have a reflective psalmist who speaks of my soul, and he begins to think about himself reflectively, internally, interiorly, and he talks to his soul, his being.

Or that we find a person who is dead, he may be described as a dead nephesh, a dead being. So being is a very useful and, I think, accurate rendering of what takes place here, that the man is not an eternal principle or eternal soul; he is decidedly mortal, and rather nephesh here means a living being versus a dead being. But a whole being that has personhood.

There is another image that's highly anthropomorphic, and that is found with the creation of the woman. And beginning with the latter half of verse 20, for the man, or we could begin to translate in some of our versions, the personal name Adam. Man is Adam, and of course you have the personal name Adam, and it is simply one of those many words that play on the name of the man, Adam.

The versions will disagree as to when it should be translated as a personal name or when it should still be translated in a generic sound, man. But you can hear the wordplay with Adam, that is man, and then the word for ground from which the man was created, and that is, I'll pronounce it slowly, Adamah. Adam and Adamah.

And so, this certainly speaks to man's vulnerability; man is fragile, and man is limited. So, when it comes to the creation of the woman, we will discover in verse 21 that God took one of the man's ribs, it is said this is traditionally, typically the way you have your translations, the way people have understood it, but it actually means just a side, like the side of a boat. The point is that he took the rib or ribs, the side of the man, and performed surgery on the man by closing it up.

But notice it says in verse 21 that the man falls into a deep sleep. And this is very useful because the man could not observe the creation of the woman. The woman is altogether different than what he had seen in contrast with the naming of the animals in verses 19 through 20.

And so, this preserves the mystery and really the importance and the magnitude of the woman who is identified as his helper. Verse 18 is not good in contrast to chapter one, which says repeatedly that God's steps are good because the chaos is transformed into the cosmos, at the end of which enables the sustenance and sustaining of human life; he says it's very good what God says about his created order in chapter one. So, it's not good for man to be alone, and it's understandable why God created a helper suitable for him.

And the way in which God created the woman, if you'll notice, has the idea of a building, building the woman into a, uh, from a rib. So, it says in verse 22, the Lord God built a woman, made a woman like a contractor who builds, and he brought her as a presentation to the man. Now, why is it that it was not good for the man to be alone? And this is very helpful for us to remember that when God created humanity, he created the man and a woman as social beings.

Here is a microcosm community and how the man and the woman will thrive in communion, a community relationship, as opposed to living in isolation. But even more important, you'll remember that the blessing involves procreation. And so by the creation of a man and a woman, two different sexes that by their sexual relationship, then they will produce a progeny human life as a part of the blessing of God.

So, when we take this together, the anthropomorphic language, it shows us the care and the intimacy that God gives in the creation of the man and the woman. I should also add that verse 18 where and verse 20 speak of a suitable helper. This is language that is striking in its Hebrew, because it's a combination of words and the meaning essentially is a corresponding helper, someone that corresponds to the man.

Again, this is a way in which, in a different kind of language, a common language, a conversational language, a highly pictorial portrayal language, we are talking about the image and that God created the man and woman in his image. And so, the man



and the woman share in being created fully as human beings. Within that humanity, we can differentiate based on their sexuality.

The sexuality that the man and woman engage in is a blessing from God. It's an appointment by God whereby the good that God has in mind for the human family, a blessing, will be realized. Human sexuality, when it is carried out in accord with God's will, is a great pleasure and blessing.

And then also I would say that because God creates the body, as we see in the creation of the man and as we see in the creation of the woman, those who would consider the body evil, both in antiquity and then today even, those who try to beat the body into submission by abusing the body, or the opposite, not by restricting the desires of the body, but rather being licentious in the body. Hedonist, just pleasure driven. These are two extremes that do not correspond to what the Bible teaches regarding the body.

We, as Christian readers, know from the Corinthian correspondence that the apostle Paul even speaks of the individual person's body and the church as a body of believers, that the Holy Spirit inhabits our body, and that he indwells the Christian believer. Moreover, we can say that God himself honors the human body by coming in the Lord Jesus Christ fully and completely into this world as a human being. And then, moreover, beyond that, that the body is resurrected and we have a new resurrected body in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we, too, who are believers in Christ, will have an experience of a resurrected body that is fit, that is appropriate for a heavenly life with Christ. So, human sexuality is a blessing from God. The body is a blessing from God.

What occurs in the garden is designed out of God's love to promote what is good for the man and the woman. So, when it comes to the description in verses 8 through 14 of chapter 2, we find the beauty the productivity of God's creation in which he places the man and then the woman. Notice what it says in verse 9, all kinds of trees, just like we saw the diversity in the creation account of chapter 1 and how each creation step of the animated life produced itself after its own kind.

Now, we have a variety of kinds when it comes to the tree that is reproducing itself. And we're told that it was pleasing to the eye. It was attractive, good, and nourishing as a food source that would sustain human life.

And that prominently, there were two trees. The first tree, the tree of life, indicated that there was life in the garden available and that by partaking of the tree of life, a person's life would be sustained. Men and women were not created initially as immortal.

They were created as mortal. Only God, in his constitution, in his being, is immortal. Men and women can enter into eternal living with God, in eternal life, as the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, that this mortal body in this mortality will be transformed into immortality.

So, the tree of life is representative of the life principle that's available in the garden. And this has to do with God's presence in the garden. The second tree is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And while there's a good deal of debate about the understanding of what that tree concerns, there is, I think, good reason to conclude that the knowledge of good and evil has to do with wisdom. And this is a great pursuit in antiquity. The value attributed to wisdom, and it was greatly sought after in the ancient Near East in their mythological stories, seeking life and seeking wisdom.

And these two great desires on the part of humanity continue in each one of us, wanting life and also wanting the wisdom of God to know how to live our lives effectively. So, God has given us desires. It's a good thing to have a desire to eat.

It's a good thing that you have a desire to work. It's a good thing that you have a desire to have sexual relations and produce a family. All of this and much more, the aesthetic beauty of the garden, as it is described in verses 10 through 14, of the beauty of the gold and the onyx and the various parts of the garden.

Now, all of this is good desire, but we cannot be enslaved to our desires. Rather, our desires, in order for them to have value, in order for our desires to be free from mindless compulsion and obsession that inevitably leads to disappointment and destruction, have got to be curved by the goodness of God, who shows us that our desires must be subject to the greater good that God has for us, his will. And so we seek to do God's will as it circumscribes our desires so that we will control our desires as opposed to our desires controlling us.

When we act upon simple desires, as we'll see in Chapter 3, on the part of the woman and the man, we will sadly discover that those desires have limited satisfaction in a sense of completeness and wholeness. So, for example, if your desire for food is a controlling obsession, then you will find you must eat, and to be satisfied, you have to eat more, but you can't be satisfied because you have to eat the next meal and the next day and the next day, and it can become destructive. Whereas when we practice the will of God, his goodness of love and provision, his goodness of presence, all of that will make our lives realize the beauty, grace, goodness, kindness, and the empowerment of God in our lives to know him.

And in knowing him, we come to better understand ourselves and know ourselves. This all has to do with the way in which we contrast chapter 2's most favorable,

beautiful work of God in creation. And then, sadly, in chapter 3, we will speak of it as a reversal of what God has in mind for creation.

Let me conclude this session, part one, with a few words about the historicity of the man and the woman, and particularly the naming of the Adam and Eve. Were they actual, historical, real persons, or did they simply represent humanity in its most broad sense? The story of Adam and Eve is just that: a story that does not have any historical correspondence to what occurred or what was real. And we loosely use the term historical to describe that which corresponds to actuality to the real.

The best reasons, I think, for taking Adam and Eve as two real historical figures would be within Genesis itself. First, the superscriptions. The superscriptions, you'll remember, are 11, and they cross the primeval history of chapters 1 through 11 through the particular patriarchal history of chapters 12 through 50, beginning with Abraham.

And just as Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the 12 sons of Jacob are described by the author as real persons in a real setting that can be historically related to a period of history that we've been able to recover from both material objects and also written objects in the Middle Bronze Age through the Late Bronze Age, roughly 2200 to 1500, just as we are able to confirm that the description of Abraham and his family fit actual history, since the superscriptions, these are the generations of bridge both halves of Genesis, then the author would have us also to understand chapters 1 through 11 as real historical events. Yes, told in a way different than history is many times explained and told in the Bible and also in contemporary times, using very much portrayal, a kind of, yes, man-centered, man-understood language so that we can better understand, as opposed to technical, scientific, and sometimes historical a technical language. So, the superscriptions, at least on the part of the author, you can accept it or reject it, understood Adam and Eve as real historical persons, as well as Noah, and then the descendants of Noah linked to Abraham's.

Adam and Eve are just as real as Adam is to Abraham and Eve to his wife, Sarah. Then, this is explained in a second way: the genealogies. When you take the genealogies of chapter 5 and chapter 11, the genealogy of Seth that runs to Noah, and then Noah's son Shem in chapter 11 that runs down to Abraham, then by the genealogies, you have a linkage from Adam to Noah to Abraham.

And so, by genealogies, the writer is telling us that these are actual historical persons and that there is a linkage between the first man, the second Adam, because Noah and his family survived the flood, and then the particular family of Abraham through whom we will be told God has in mind a blessing available to all. This is the first part of the garden story. In our second part, we will pick up the story at the end of chapter 2, the very last verses 24 and 25, and then we will talk about the sin that

occurred in the garden that so disrupted but did not completely and wholly make obsolete the good plan of God for humanity.

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