

Genesis, Session 3A: The Garden Story, Part 1 (Genesis 2:4–3:24)

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Abstract

This lecture examines the narrative of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:4–3:24, contrasting its intimate, earthy, and relational portrayal of creation with the cosmic and highly structured account in Genesis 1. Dr. Kenneth Mathews analyzes key Hebrew terms such as *Yahweh*, *nephesh*, and *adamah* to emphasize God's personal covenant with humanity, the goodness of the physical body, and the divine design of human sexuality. He explores the symbolic significance of the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, demonstrating how human desires must remain bounded by God's sovereign will to prevent self-destruction. Finally, the text defends the historical reality of Adam and Eve, using the structural genealogies and overarching superscriptions within Genesis to show they are presented as actual historical figures.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Garden Story (Genesis 2:4–4:26)

- **A. Literary Boundaries:** Under the generational superscription of Genesis 2:4, the broader story extends to Genesis 4:26.
- **B. Geographic Division:**
 1. Events inside the garden (Genesis 2:4–3:24).
 2. The human family outside the garden (Genesis 4:1–26).

II. The Complementary Relationship Between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2

- **A. Genesis 1 (The Cosmic Account):**
 1. **Structural Symmetry:** Focused on the organization of six days of creation plus a seventh day of rest.
 2. **Literary Style:** Elevated prose, rapid pace, and recurring formulaic language.

3. **The Name *Elohim*:** Emphasizes God's universal transcendence, deity, and almighty power.
 4. **Technical Language:** Utilizes specialized terms like *bara* (create) and *selem* (image).
- **B. Genesis 2–4 (The Earthy Account):**
 1. **Narrative Style:** Highly processional, slow-paced focus on the sixth day, featuring direct and indirect speech, and cause-and-effect plots.
 2. **The Name *Yahweh*:** Paired with *Elohim* to denote the personal, covenant God of Israel.
 3. **Linguistic Wordplay:** Heightens narrative meaning (e.g., *ish* / *ishshah* [man/woman] and *Adam* / *adamah* [man/ground]).

III. The Anthropomorphic Creation of Humanity

- **A. Formation of the Man (Genesis 2:7):**
 1. **The Potter Image:** God is depicted intimately shaping the man (*Adam*) from the clay/dust of the ground (*adamah*).
 2. **The Breath of Life:** God breathes directly into the nostrils of the clay figure to animate it.
 3. **Defining *Nephesh*:** The term represents a "living being" or whole mortal person, contrasting with Greek philosophical concepts of a disembodied eternal soul.
- **B. Formation of the Woman (Genesis 2:18-23):**
 1. **The Deep Sleep:** Preserves the mystery of the woman's creation, preventing the man from observing the process.
 2. **The Side/Rib:** God "builds" the woman from the man's side, emphasizing physical unity and connection.
 3. **The Suitable Helper (*Ezer Kenegdo*):** Denotes a corresponding partner, establishing mutual equality and a microcosm of community.

IV. Theology of the Physical Body and Human Sexuality

- **A. Biblical View of the Body:** Rejects the extremes of ascetic body abuse and licentious hedonism, affirming the body as a good creation.

- **B. Sexuality as a Blessing:** Affirms human sexuality and procreation as divine appointments meant for pleasure and relational communion.
- **C. New Testament Connections:** The physical body is honored through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of physical resurrection.

V. Geography and Spiritual Features of the Garden (Genesis 2:8-15)

- **A. Geographic Setting:** Located in the East in Eden, linked to Mesopotamia through the Tigris, Euphrates, Gishon, and Pishon rivers.
- **B. The Two Core Trees:**
 1. **The Tree of Life:** Represents the life principle and God's sustaining presence in the garden for mortal humans.
 2. **The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:** Symbolizes the pursuit of wisdom.
- **C. Desires and the Will of God:** Natural desires (food, work, sex) are good but must be curbed and circumscribed by God's will to avoid destructive obsessions.

VI. Disruption and Broken Harmony (Genesis 3)

- **A. The Reversal:** The harmonious relationships of Genesis 2 are shattered by human disobedience in Genesis 3.
- **B. Threefold Fracturing:** Disrupts the relationship between humanity and God, creates strife within the human family (man and woman), and breaks peace with the animal world.
- **C. Redemptive Recovery:** The fractured relationship is repaired and ultimately exceeded through the reconciliation of Jesus Christ.

VII. The Historicity of Adam and Eve

- **A. The Structural Role of Superscriptions (*Toledot*):** The eleven generational headers bridge primeval history (Chapters 1–11) with the patriarchal history of Abraham (Chapters 12–50), treating both as historical reality.
- **B. The Genealogies (Genesis 5 and 11):** Explicitly link Adam to Noah and Noah to Abraham, confirming the author's intent to present Adam and Eve as real historical individuals.