

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian
Students

Presented by the
President of

Central Baptist
Theological
Seminary of
Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

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January 13, 2006

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The Creation Narratives

Part Two

The God Who appears in the creation narrative of Genesis 1 is a good, benevolent being. He fashions humanity in His image, placing people in a good world made for their use. He pronounces His blessing upon humans, then initiates a rest that implies delight in Him and His works.

The goodness of this God is further highlighted in the second creation narrative, which occupies Genesis 2:5-24. In this narrative, Moses recapitulates the story of creation with a significant shift in perspective. This retelling of the story allows him to focus the reader's attention more specifically upon God's purpose for humanity.

God's goodness is emphasized from the beginning of the account. The original creation had no weeds, no harsh weather, and no hard labor. Rather, God provided everything for the man whom He created, placing him in a garden or sheltered park. Moses specifies the location of this garden by naming four rivers that would have been familiar to the people of his day. The Tigris (Hiddekel) and Euphrates are known to moderns. The Pison is unknown. The Gihon, while not known, is said to flow through the land of Cush, which places it somewhere in the western Arabian peninsula or east Africa. The Gihon may be another name for the Nile (though this is doubtful). It could be another reference to the “River of Egypt” that evidently marked the border of that country.

In any case, Moses depicts Eden as a place that was larger than a farm or even a city. It stretched from modern-day Iraq all the way (approximately) to modern-day Egypt. The garden was larger than many entire nations. Incidentally, it also appears to correspond to the boundaries of the land that was later promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18), as well as the territory that was tributary to Solomon (2 Chr. 9:26).

Eden was a beautiful park that God prepared for humanity. God “rested” the man in the garden (Gen. 2:15), which carries implications of shelter and safety. God caused trees to grow there for the man’s nourishment. He also caused other trees to grow: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad.

The name of the second tree is what ties this narrative to the first creation account in Genesis 1. The emphasis of the first account was on the goodness of the Creator. The second account reemphasizes the Creator’s benevolence in many ways. The expansive dimensions of the garden, its nature as a sheltered park, the provision of food, and above all, God’s provision of safety reflect the kind nature of the good God who blesses.

The tree also draws attention to God’s purpose for humanity. This has already been intimated in Genesis 2:14, which should probably be translated that God “rested” the man in the garden “for worship and obedience” (see Cassuto or Sailhamer for the reasons). If this translation is correct, then the man was made to be a priest, not a farmer. He was made to walk with His Maker, to adore Him, and to obey Him.

Obedience should be easy when every command comes from a completely benevolent deity. Both creation narratives emphasize God’s goodness repeatedly. This alerts readers that God is worth obeying, that His commands stem only from His interest in blessing humans.

That is why God confronts the man with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad. Throughout this context, *good* means *useful* or *beneficial*. This hints at the purpose of the tree. Surely it was a real tree with real fruit, but it was also a symbolic tree that represented the knowledge good and bad. To this point, God has always been the one to say what is good. Human responsibility has consisted entirely in the willingness to receive whatever good the Creator has provided. Human knowledge of the bad is non-existent, and human knowledge of the good is a derived knowledge that comes strictly from trusting the Creator. Therefore, the tree must represent the intention for the man to determine good and bad for himself. If the man will not trust the Creator to determine what is good, then he will have to decide for himself. He will gain his own knowledge of good and bad.

In other words, what was being tested was Adam’s willingness to trust God. By not eating of the tree, the man would be submitting himself to God’s decisions about what was good and what was bad. If he ate of the tree, however, that would signify his declaration of independence from God and his choice to determine good and bad for himself. This would be the worst sort of treason, for it would imply that the man now considered the Creator to be untrustworthy. In this test, obedience and trust are inextricably linked.

If the man rejected the Creator, pronounced Him untrustworthy, and declared independence, he would come under sentence of death. How could it be otherwise? The Creator is the origin of life. To separate one’s self from Him is to choose death. God warned that if the man ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad, then sentence of death would

be passed on the same day.

At this point, all of the pieces are in place for the great drama of temptation that will follow in Genesis 3. Before the man is allowed to face temptation, however, one further episode intervenes. This episode begins when God declares that something is *not* good. He says that it is not good for the man to be alone, and He purposes to make for the man a helper “like himself.” This comes as a surprise, because up until this point everything has been *very* good. Why choose this stage of the narrative at which to announce what is not good?

The crucial question is whether the Creator really deserves the trust that He requires from the man. Can humans truly rely upon the Creator to supply everything that is good for them? Will the Creator notice any deficiencies, and can He be trusted to supply them?

God was aware of Adam’s need even before Adam had noticed it. In fact, God had to show Adam the need by putting him through an exercise in taxonomy. By comparing and classifying (naming) animals, the man discovered that he was alone in the world. No one else like him existed.

God was now in the position to meet the need. He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, took one of his ribs, and fashioned a woman. He then brought her to the man and presented her to him. Adam’s response takes the form of the first poem to be composed by any human being.

She is bone of my bones,
Flesh of my flesh,
She shall be called *Ishah*,
Because she was taken out of *Ish*.

Adam’s poem draws attention to the likeness between the man and the woman, which in turn provides the basis for the intimacy that God intended them to enjoy. This is an expression of ecstatic joy. Not only did the Creator notice the need before Adam was aware of it, but He also met the need in a way that was beyond anything Adam could imagine.

The Creator God—our God—is absolutely worthy of our trust. He is good and benevolent by His very nature. He desires our trust and obedience, but He does not compel it. To worship God by our trust and obedience is that for which we were made. It is our highest good, and no lesser good can satisfy us. ✕

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

By Night When Others Soundly Slept
Anne Bradstreet (c.1612-1672)

BY night when others soundly slept
And hath at once both ease and Rest,
My waking eyes were open kept
And so to lie I found it best.
I sought him whom my Soul did Love,
With tears I sought him earnestly.
He bow'd his ear down from Above.
In vain I did not seek or cry.
My hungry Soul he fill'd with Good;
He in his Bottle put my tears,
My smarting wounds washt in his blood,
And banisht thence my Doubts and fears.
What to my Saviour shall I give
Who freely hath done this for me?
I'll serve him here whilst I shall live
And Loue him to Eternity. ✕

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