

04. Genesis 2:4 – 25



Gustav Klimt 'The Kiss'

- We are not sharing here in privileged information that gives us the names of the first human couple, and describes how they actually lived in paradise before they sinned. Rather, we have a reflection on what it means to be human, set in contrast to the myths of the Ancient Near East, and from the perspective of Israel's faith.

- We are offered a reflection on what life could be like if we only listened to God, and on some fundamental dimensions of sin and its terrible consequences for human life. The account no doubt reflects on legends of the patriarchs and on Israel's history, but it is a story which aims to help build a harmonious community in Judah by pointing out the kind of behaviour that must be avoided to be faithful to God's covenant and live the kind of life willed by God.

- The authors, as we shall see, make no attempt to tell how evil came into the world. The talking serpent is a figure of fable, not the devil in disguise. Nor are they telling their readers the origin of death. Birth and death are obviously essential dimensions of being human.

- The text does say something about human folly, but, as we should expect, the focus is on God and on God's response to our folly. We shall see how loving this is – a lesson the returned exiles needed to hear. The narrative reminded them (and it continues to remind us) that we are destined to live in God's world, and in dependence on God. It insists that the Creator is their own YHWH, the One who hears the cry of the poor. The effects of our sin – portrayed here as punishment – can be corrective because of the mercy of God. But we cannot go on sinning without suffering sin's consequences.

- These chapters focus on the limits within which human beings must live. If they are going to build a faithful community in post-exile Judah they should live wisely, attentive to God's directions. If they do not, they are in danger of bringing upon themselves a repetition of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the suffering of exile.
- The correct question to ask ourselves as we read this material is not 'What is the meaning of these past events to us today?', but 'What are the authors saying about the human condition?'

- Though the material which we are about to read has links with myth, the authors are not interested in myth or in its cultic expression, which in the Ancient Near East was mostly conceived as a tool for supporting the ruler (considered 'divine') and the state.

- The authors of Genesis are interested in history, in human behaviour and responsible action, here formalised in a description of the human-being-as-such [hā 'ādām], and the various basic relationships within which we human beings live out our lives. They assert that we are inclined towards evil (8:21) but they reiterate their conviction that YHWH is intimately involved in human history and that divine mercy, as has just been demonstrated in the return from exile, transcends our sin.

- They speak of the paradox of being human: the dust and the spirit, the sanctity and the sin, the wonder and the limitations that we all experience. The meta-historical nature of the writings is highlighted by the fact that there is no distinction between the sacred and the profane, there are no epiphanies, no theophanies, no revelation, and no faith: only direct encounter with God. This is not history; it is story. It has something of the feel of ‘once upon a time’.

- We have our origin in God, but our communion is disturbed by our choices to go our own way without regard for God's will for us. The post-exilic authors were especially keen to inculcate a profound obedience to God's will in the community gathered around the reconstructed temple.

- In Genesis 2-3, the authors are asking: What is God's design for the human race? Why are we the way we are? Why do we experience this radical ambivalence in our relationship to God? They are also reassuring the people that failure does not have to have the last word. God's gift is such that we can be restored to life after failure. Community can be restored.

This is followed by chapter 4 in which they reflect that
the disharmony that we humans experience,
the pain, the sweated labour,
the experience of the absence of God,
of suffering and of guilt,
are all the results of human disobedience, of our failure
to listen to the inspiration of God's Spirit.

- Part One. Genesis 2:4b-25. From wilderness to a world of fullness and communion
- 1. Life needs rain from God and God uses mankind as his instrument in ordering the earth (2:4-6)
- When YHWH God made earth and the heavens, no plant of the field was yet on the earth and no herb had yet sprung up for YHWH God had not caused it to rain upon the earth and there was no human being [*'âdâm*] to till the ground [*'adâmah*] or to draw water from the earth, or to irrigate the whole surface of the ground.

2. The human being = dust of the earth + God's living and life-giving breath (spirit) (2:7).

- Then YHWH God formed the human being [*'âdâm*] from the dust of the ground [*'adâmah*] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the human being became a living being.

- ‘Remember that you moulded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again?’ (Job 10:9).
- ‘You return us back to dust, children of earth back to earth’ (Psalm 90:3).
- ‘As a father has compassion for his children, so GOD has compassion for us who revere God. GOD does not fail to remember that we are but dust’ (Psalm 103:13-14).

- Psalm 104:27-30

²⁷All these creatures look to you
to give them their food in due season.

²⁸When you provide it, they feed.

When you open wide your hand, they have their fill.

²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed.

When you take away their breath,
they die and return to dust.

³⁰You send forth your breath, and they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth [*ʿadâmah*].

3. The garden of Eden ('delight' - Ugarit) (Genesis 2:8-15)

'paradise': Persian for a 'pleasure garden surrounded by a stone or earthen wall'.

Genesis 2:8-9

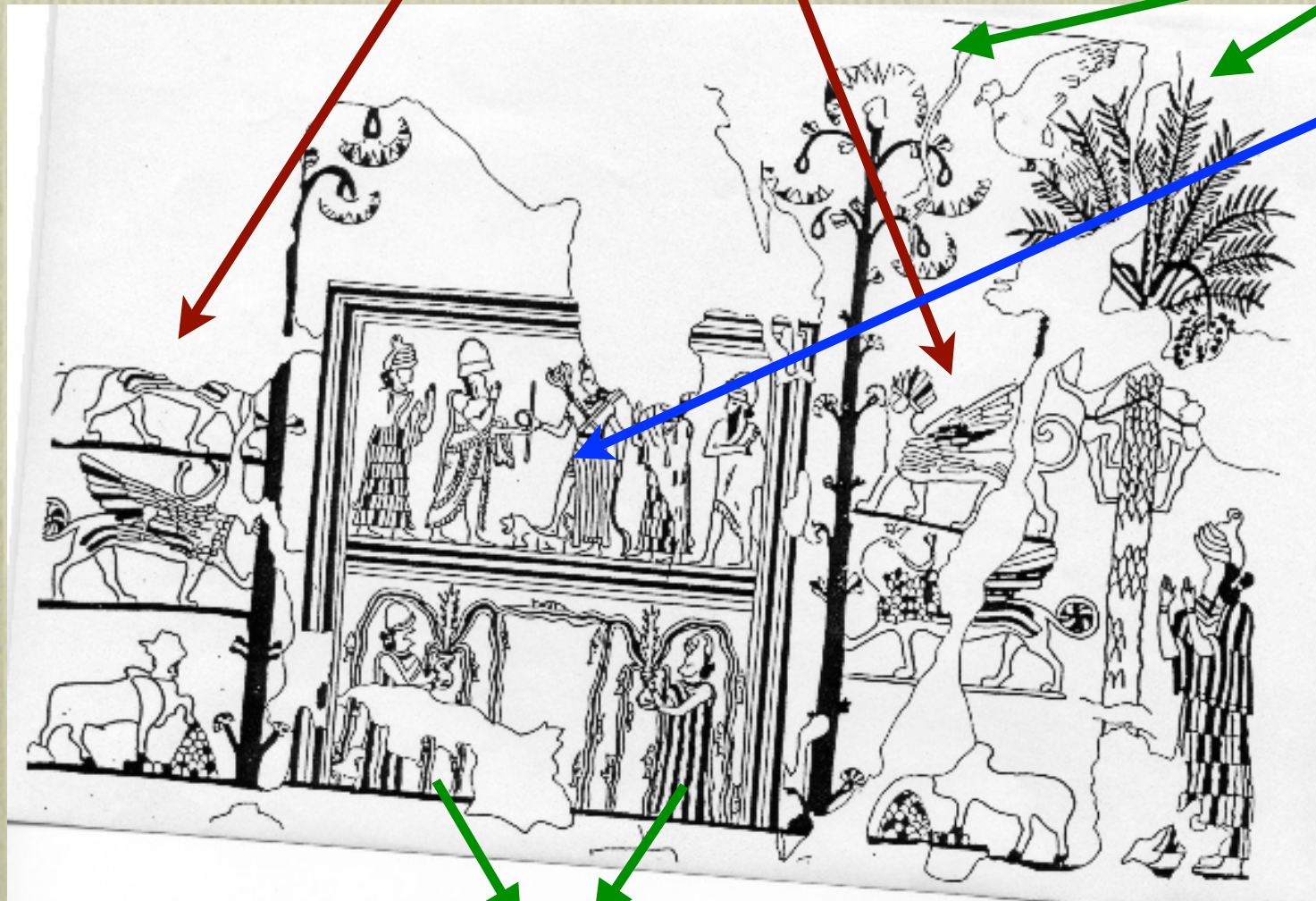
And YHWH God planted a garden in Eden, in the east and there he put the human being whom he had formed. Out of the ground YHWH God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to look at and good for food, the tree of life also was in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:10-14 The life arteries of all the lands of the earth have their source in the river that waters paradise.

- A river is flowing from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah (south-west Arabia) where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.
- The name of the second river is Gihon (Nile); it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Mari 17th century BC

Cherubim guarding sanctuary



- trees in paradise

Ishtar, goddess of fertility, love & war exercising dominion over the lion.

4 streams flowing from the sanctuary

Genesis 2:15

- YHWH God took the human being and settled him in the garden of Eden to till it and to care for it.
- ‘Yahweh has pity on Zion, has pity on all her ruins; turns her desolation into an Eden, her wasteland into the garden of Yahweh. Joy and gladness shall be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of music’ (Isaiah 51:3).



- 4. Creaturely existence demands of its essence a relationship of receptivity to the Creator. Break this link and creation collapses. Note the second person address (2:16-17).
- Then YHWH God commanded the human being:
'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden. But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, for on the day you eat from it you will die'.

- ‘Then he showed me a river of the water of life, bright as crystal, issuing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of the city square; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations’ (Apocalypse 22:1-2).

Knowledge of good and evil

- Capacity to discern what is useful and avoid what is harmful
- Capacity to discern what is morally good and morally evil
- Capacity to know everything (the whole range) – like God.
- Capacity to make up one's own mind as to what is good and what is evil and act it out without reference to God.

- 5. The complementarity, inter-dependence and equality of man and woman (2:18-20)
- YHWH God said: 'It is not good for the human being to be alone. I will make for him a helper who will face him'. So YHWH God formed from the ground all the animals of the field and all birds of the heavens and he brought them to the human being to see what he would call them and whatever the human being called the living beings, that was their name. The human being gave their names to all the livestock, to all the birds of the heavens, and to all the animals of the field, but for the human being no helper who will face him was found.

2:21-22

- So YHWH God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human being so that he slept. He took a rib and immediately closed up the flesh again. And YHWH God made the rib [in Sumerian a play on the word for a woman giving birth] that he had taken from the human being into a woman and he brought her to the man.



Genesis 2:23-25

- And the man said: ‘This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! She is to be called ‘woman’ [*’ishshah*] because from ‘man’ [*’ish*] she was taken’. The first direct speech of a human being is a cry of delight from a husband to a wife.
- [Therefore a man [*’ish*] leaves his father and mother and stays attached to his woman [*’ishshah*] and they become one flesh]
- Both of them were naked [*’arôm*], the man and his wife, and they were unashamed.



‘The primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; and he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears and two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. He could walk upright as men now do, backward or forward as he pleased, and he could also roll over and over at a great pace, turning on his four hands and four feet, eight in all, like tumblers going over and over with their legs in the air; this was when he wanted to run fast ... He aspired against the gods, but Zeus sliced each one in two ... After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one ... the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man.’

Conclusion to Part I

Human beings come from the dust but live because of the divine spirit.

Human beings [*'âdâ_um*] are to live in caring control of the animal world and in mutual inter-dependence with the soil [*'adâ_umah*].

Human beings are to live in dialogue with God and in dependence on God's word.

Human beings are man and woman facing each other in equality and delight.