

BEARING THE IMAGE OF GOD

In Psalm 8:4 (NKJV) David the psalmist asks rhetorically, ‘what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him?’ To this fundamental question regarding human identity David gives an answer rooted in the creation account. Despite the smallness of human beings in God’s universe, ‘Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet’ (vv. 5-6). The psalm takes us straight back to the account of human origins in Genesis 1-3.

We should note at this point that the Bible everywhere assumes that Adam and Eve are historical

figures. There is, for example, no stage in the Genesis record where we can discern a transition from ‘myth’ (or some other such term) to ‘history’. The record is all of a piece—it is all history. To this we must add Jesus’ clear and straightforward acceptance of the historicity of the account of the origin of marriage given in Genesis 2 where He debates divorce with the Pharisees (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). The Genesis record is quoted as fact: ‘he who created them from the beginning made them male and female’ (Matt. 19:4). The same outlook is evident in the Apostle Paul. Regarding Adam’s creation he quotes Genesis 2:7, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’ (1 Cor. 15:45). The historicity of both Adam and Eve is accepted by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:13, ‘Adam was formed first, then Eve’ (with their fall mentioned in verse 14). Of greatest significance is the extended comparison of Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12ff. The one is as historical as the other.

If we accept the absolute authority of the Bible, we must accept the historicity of Adam and Eve. To deny



In Genesis 5:2 we read, ‘Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man [Adam].’ The name of the first man, Adam, is sometimes used to designate male human beings as distinguished from females (eg Gen. 2:22, 25) but sometimes also to designate the whole human race. This practice originates with God and so it should not be objectionable to us to refer to the human race as ‘man’. That does not excuse insensitivity in our use of language so as to marginalise women, but ‘man’ as a term for the race is not just an accidental feature of Hebrew: it is God’s naming activity and therefore good and holy.

that is to claim that Jesus and Paul (when he wrote Scripture) were fallible, and if on this issue, then on how many more? Adam is not some kind of mythological figure or an ‘everyman’ depicting the course that all men and women follow. He was an actual historical figure.

MAN’S UNIQUE ORIGIN

Two accounts of man’s creation are provided in Genesis 1:26-27 and in Genesis 2:7, 21-23. These are complementary accounts, not contradictory. The first is part of a chronological account of the entire creation, whilst the second places the focus on man and shows how all that went before was designed to provide a suitable environment for human beings. Both accounts set out aspects of human uniqueness:

A Unique Consultation

In Genesis 1:26 God says, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’. The plural ‘us’ and ‘our’ is best understood as an early indication of plurality within the one God whom the New Testament will reveal to be a Trinity, three ‘persons’ in one God. It is not, of course, an indication that God needed to discuss or weigh the pros and cons of creating man. It is a means of showing that man is the object of God’s special care. As Calvin says, ‘This is the highest honour with which he has dignified us’.²

A Unique Method

At each stage of the creation account we note God's direct command, such as 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3), 'Let the waters swarm' (v. 20). The creation of man is significantly different. In Genesis 2:7 we read, 'then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.' However God may have acted in the rest of His creative work, there is in the creation of man an element of immediate personal involvement on the Lord's part. Whilst pre-existing material was used for the body, life is imparted in a unique way, God breathing the breath of life into Adam's nostrils.

A Unique Pattern

Living creatures and plants were created 'after their kind' (eg Gen. 1:11-12), indicating a range of divine patterns or blueprints for different groupings in the creation. With reference to man, however, we read in Genesis 1:26: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. We will have to consider what those expressions tell us about the human constitution, but we can say right away that they set man apart as the unique bearer of God's image. At the very least a special relationship with the Lord is indicated.

A Unique Constitution

Genesis 2:7 indicates that there are two elements in man's constitution. There is first the body, made up of 'dust from the ground'. A second element is breathed into Adam by God Himself, namely 'the breath of life'. In the case of man this expression seems to indicate something more than the 'life' possessed by the animals. This is reinforced by a verse such as Ecclesiastes 12:7: 'the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it'. Two elements, a physical and a non-physical or spiritual are in view. In the New Testament the same view is stated in Jesus' words in Matthew 10:28 with reference to those 'who kill the body but cannot kill the soul'. What precisely 'spirit' and 'soul' refer to will be considered below.

A Unique Position

The structure of the creation account shows that man is the apex of God's creation, towards whom the rest of His work leads. Each part of creation has value in itself, but above all it provides a suitable environment for God's image-bearer. As Genesis 1:28 indicates, man was given 'dominion' over the creation, a concept which requires careful consideration. Under God, man stands

If we reject the historicity of Genesis 1-3 we also demolish the foundation of human uniqueness and create all kinds of problems, theological and ethical.

