

# Genesis 2:4–25

*The Formation of Man, the Garden, and the First Marriage*

A Literal Study of the Text

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## Introduction

Genesis 2:1–3 — covering God’s rest and the sanctifying of the seventh day — has been addressed in the Genesis 1 study. This study picks up at verse 4, where the narrative shifts dramatically in both focus and tone.

Where Genesis 1 surveys all six days from a cosmic perspective, Genesis 2:4–25 zooms in on Eden, on Adam, on the making of the woman, and on the first human relationship. This is not a second, contradictory creation account. The Hebrew literary marker *toledoth* (“this is the account of”) in verse 4 signals a close-up of events already introduced — specifically the sixth day and what immediately followed. Together, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 give the reader a complete picture of what God did and why it matters.

We will work through the passage section by section, reading the text in its plain, straightforward sense, drawing out its theological significance, and asking what it demands of us today.

### Key Themes in Genesis 2:4–25

The *toledoth* marker and its literary function • The particular, hands-on formation of man from dust • The Garden of Eden as a real, physical place • The two named trees and the moral weight they carry • The first command given to man • The making of woman from man’s rib • The institution of marriage as God’s design • Pre-fall innocence as a picture of God’s original intent

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## Section 1 — The Formation of Man: Verses 4–7

## The Text (NASB)

**2:4** *This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.*

**2:5–6** *Now no shrub of the field was yet on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground.*

**2:7** *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 person.*

## Observation

Verse 4 introduces the Hebrew phrase *toledoth* — “this is the account of.” This is a literary marker used throughout Genesis to introduce a more detailed look at something already mentioned. It confirms that what follows is not a separate creation story but a focused account of specific events within the creation week.

Verse 7 is one of the most significant verses in all of Scripture. God did not speak man into existence as He did the rest of creation. He “formed” (Hebrew: *yatsar* — the word used of a potter shaping clay) the man from the “dust of the ground.” This is a deliberate, hands-on, personal act. Man’s body is material, formed from the earth. Man’s life is spiritual, breathed in by God. Both elements are essential to what a human being is.

## Key Points

- The name used for God changes here from Elohim to LORD God (Yahweh Elohim) — introducing the personal, covenant name of God, signalling a shift to a relational narrative.
- Man’s body comes from dust; his life comes from the direct breath of God. This establishes the unique dignity of human beings above all other creatures.
- The phrase “living person” (KJV: “living soul,” *nephesh chayyah*) is used of animals in Genesis 1:24 as well, yet man alone received his life by the direct breath of God. Man is not merely biological; he is spiritual.

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## Section 2 — The Garden and Its Trees: Verses 8–17

### The Text (NIV)

**2:8** Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

**2:9** The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

**2:10–14** A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters ... The name of the third river is the Tigris ... And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

**2:15** The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

**2:16–17** And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

## Observation

Eden was a real, geographical place. The mention of four rivers — including the Tigris and the Euphrates, rivers that still exist today — anchors this account in history and geography, not myth or allegory. The specific details (the names of rivers, the land of Havilah, the land of Cush) are the marks of historical narrative, not symbolic poetry.

God’s first command to Adam is also one of the most gracious: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.” The garden was abundant. The one restriction — the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — was not arbitrary cruelty. It was a test of trust and a boundary that protected Adam’s relationship with God. The consequence stated was death, which should be understood literally: spiritual separation from God, which would lead to physical death as well (as Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12 confirm).

## The Two Trees

### The Tree of Life

Eating from it sustained life in the garden. After the fall, access was cut off (Gen. 3:22–24) to prevent fallen man from living forever in a sinful state. The tree reappears in Revelation 22:2, where the redeemed will eat from it freely — showing that God’s original design will be fully restored.

### **The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**

Not forbidden because knowledge is bad, but because man was not yet meant to define good and evil independently of God. Eating it was an act of claiming moral autonomy — deciding for oneself what is right and wrong apart from the Creator. This is the very heart of all sin.

### **Key Points**

- Man was placed in the garden to “work it and keep it” (ESV). Work is not a curse — it existed before the fall. The curse of Genesis 3 made work toilsome, not work itself.
- The command in verses 16–17 is the first recorded spoken command of God to man. Obedience was the expected norm of the relationship.
- The death promised for disobedience was not merely metaphorical. Romans 5:12 confirms that death spread to all men because of Adam’s sin, confirming a literal, historical fall.

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## **Section 3 — The Making of Woman & the First Marriage: Verses 18–25**

### **The Text (NKJV)**

**2:18** *And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”*

**2:19–20** *Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them ... But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.*

**2:21–22** *And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.*

**2:23** *And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”*

**2:24–25** *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

### **Observation**

God declares that it is “not good” for man to be alone. This is the first time in Scripture that God pronounces something “not good” — which powerfully highlights the relational nature of human beings and the importance of the woman’s creation. Man was not complete in isolation; he needed a “helper comparable to him” (Hebrew: ezer kenegdo — a help who is his counterpart, his match).

The naming of the animals demonstrates Adam’s God-given authority over creation and also makes plain that no animal could fulfill the role of a comparable companion. The stage is set so that when the woman is presented, Adam immediately recognises her as uniquely suited to him.

The woman is taken from the man’s rib (Hebrew: tsela, also translated “side”). This is not poetic language — it is a literal, surgical act performed by God under anesthesia (the “deep sleep”). Adam’s exclamation in verse 23 is the first recorded human speech: poetry bursting out of him in joyful recognition. She is not a separate creation but taken from him — which is exactly why he declares her “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

### **The Foundation of Marriage**

Verse 24 is not merely a cultural observation — it is a divine ordinance. The word “therefore” connects this institution directly to the act just described: because God made woman from man, a man and woman are joined in marriage as “one flesh.” Jesus Himself quotes this verse in Matthew 19:4–5 when affirming the permanence of marriage, demonstrating that Genesis 2 is to be taken as the authoritative, literal foundation for the institution.

### **Key Points**

- Marriage, as defined by God in Genesis 2, is between one man and one woman. This is not a cultural accommodation but a creation ordinance — it precedes sin, law, culture, and every human institution.
  - The woman being a “helper” (ezer) carries no lesser dignity. The same word is used of God Himself in Psalm 121:2. Being a helper is a position of strength and purpose, not inferiority.
  - The “one flesh” union points to both the physical union of marriage and the deep spiritual and relational unity it creates. Paul references this in Ephesians 5:31–32.
  - The absence of shame in verse 25 reflects perfect innocence. Shame entered with the fall (Genesis 3:7). Here, in their untainted state, Adam and Eve stood before God and each other in complete openness and purity.
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## Application & Personal Reflection

Genesis 2:4–25 is not ancient mythology to be spiritualised away — it is the literal account of the world as God made it, the life He gave man, and the relationships He established. Its truths are foundational to how we understand human dignity, work, marriage, and our relationship with God.

- Because God formed you personally from dust and breathed His own life into you, every human being has inherent, God-given dignity. This is not earned or evolving — it was spoken into existence.
  - Because work was given before the fall, your labour — whatever it is — has genuine meaning. You are doing what God designed you to do: tending and keeping some portion of His creation.
  - Because God defined marriage in Genesis 2, no human authority — cultural, legal, or otherwise — has the power to redefine it. Marriage is God’s institution, established on His terms.
  - Because the death that came from disobedience in verse 17 is the same death undone by Christ in Romans 5:15–17, the gospel itself is rooted in the literal history of Genesis 2 and 3.
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## Discussion Questions

1. Verse 4 uses the toledoth marker to signal a close-up of events already introduced in Genesis 1. How does recognising this literary device help defend the unity and reliability of the creation account?
  2. Man was formed from dust and received the breath of God. How does this dual nature — material body and God-breathed spirit — shape how we think about human identity, death, and resurrection?
  3. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was forbidden because eating it meant claiming moral autonomy from God. In what ways do we continue to make the same claim today?
  4. Adam named the animals before Eve was created. What does this sequence tell us about the nature of the man's role and the significance of recognising that no animal could be his companion?
  5. Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 as the authoritative basis for His teaching on marriage in Matthew 19. How should the fact that marriage is a creation ordinance shape how the church speaks about marriage publicly?
  6. Adam and Eve were naked without shame before the fall. What does this tell us about what God's original design for human relationships looks like, and how does the gospel begin to restore that openness?
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## Memory Verse

### **Genesis 2:24 (ESV)**

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

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## Cross-Reference Guide

The following passages connect directly to the themes in Genesis 2:4–25 and reward careful comparison:

### **On the Formation of Man**

- Psalm 139:13–16 — God’s personal, deliberate formation of every human being in the womb echoes Genesis 2:7.
- 1 Corinthians 15:45–49 — Paul contrasts the “living soul” of Adam with the “life-giving spirit” of Christ, the last Adam.

### **On the Two Trees**

- Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14 — The tree of life reappears in the new creation, promising what was lost in the fall will be fully restored.
- Romans 5:12–19 — The death that came from eating the forbidden tree is directly addressed by Christ’s obedience.

### **On Marriage**

- Matthew 19:3–6 — Jesus cites Genesis 2:24 as the definitive statement on the permanence of marriage.
- Ephesians 5:22–33 — Paul uses the one-flesh union of Genesis 2 as the picture of Christ’s relationship with His church.
- 1 Corinthians 6:16 — Paul cites Genesis 2:24 to explain the gravity of sexual immorality.

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*Soli Deo Gloria*

To God alone be the glory