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# Exegesis 17: The Perfect Woman for the Solitary Man

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This article offers an exegesis of Genesis 2: 18-25 which is foundational to current discussion of gender roles.

## **The Context**

These verses are the counterpart of Gen 1:26-27. This is not another account of Creation, as some scholars insist. Gen 2:4ff is a 'blow by blow' account of the sixth day of Creation. These verses are answering the question of the origin of 'woman'. Man was created male and female. But only the male was the head and representative of humanity. All others came from him, and this included Eve. Hence we need to understand the origin of woman. The explanation which these verses give of the place of woman prepares the way for the events of Gen 3 and the role of the woman in those catastrophic events.

## **God's Appraisal of Man's Need (v 18)**

There is something in Creation that is "not good", *LO'-TOB*. Blocher, quoting from Cassuto, suggests that this is an emphatic negative, much stronger in meaning than the usual negative *'EYN TOB*. God's assessment of the man's situation is that there is not simply an absence of something but a painful deficiency.<sup>1</sup> What is clear is that the man, as male, was incomplete and this was part of God's purpose. God did not make a mistake, nor is He admitting to any fault in His Creation. He created man in this way, that it was not good for him to be alone.

The Hebrew word translated as "alone" *LEBADDU*, is from the masculine noun *BAD*, used to express solitude and isolation. Lifelong isolation is not good for man. God created him to be sociable.

God therefore declares He will make a suitable assistant for the man. The Hebrew word *'EZER* usually means "assistance", but frequently it is used to designate "an assistant", or "one who helps". The significant point is that the word does not imply inferiority in any way. Very often God is the "helper" of man, in a military sense. However the assistant is further defined by the word *KENEGDO*. The two words form one unit in the sentence. *'EZER* is compounded with the preposition *NEGED*, in order to define the deficiency in the man. This means that the assistant is "in front of", "face to face", "corresponding" to the man. Calvin suggests that the *KE* prefix is the *KE* of similitude. He thinks the LXX has caught the meaning well with *kat' auton*, "according to him". Calvin deduces from this that marriage extends to all parts of a man's life.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Man 'Discovers' His Isolation (vv 19-20)**

This verse, and what follows, is an exposition of the preceding statement of v 18.

The verb *WAYYISER* is 3rd Masc Sing Imperfect, Qal, with Waw Consecutive. Some translate this simply as the past tense, "God formed". Some scholars took this to be a

contradiction of the events of chapter 1, suggesting that certain animals were formed after man. Although a simple past tense is sufficient, the pluperfect is also legitimate, giving the more accurate translation “God had formed”.

The use of the verb *WAYYABE* implies that God led the animals to the man and nothing more than that is necessary. The animals were in perfect subordination to the will of God; the Creator was known by the creatures.

The text is explicit in indicating the practical details of the naming ceremony. Two groups of animal are mentioned: *KOL HAYAT HASSADEH* and *KOL-'OP HASHSHAMAYIM*. It is not the “beasts of the earth”, as in Genesis 1, but the “beasts of the field”. This certainly implies a limit to the animals that were brought to the man. The fish are not mentioned, nor the “creeping things”.

The phrase *WEKOL' ASHER YIQRA' - LO HA'ADAM NEPESH HAYAH HU' SHE MO*, translated “whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name”, is unusual. The *-LO* stands in apposition to *NEPESH HAYAH*. Leupold suggests smoothness of grammar has been sacrificed for clarity. The point of the verse is clear. The animals were named in conformity with the life they lived.

In v 20 a third class of animal is mentioned in the naming process *HABBEHEMAH*, which translates as “cattle”, or “domestic cattle”. This may be synonymous with “beasts of the field”, but since this phrase also occurs in v 20 this is not clear from the context.

The conclusion of this process is that the man is now aware of his isolation. The phrase *'EZER KENEGDO* is repeated, and the emphasis is falling on the man’s awareness of his need. After all the animals had been named the feeling of solitude is prominent in the man’s mind. God did not make any mistake in man’s creation. Before the naming process God was aware of the man’s need; He has simply uncovered that need to the man’s consciousness.

### **The Building of the Perfect Woman (vv 21-22)**

The Lord caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, *TARDEMAH*, “a very deep sleep”. The same word is used of Abraham, Gen 15:12; of Saul and his army, 1 Sam 26:12; and also of Jonah, Jon 1:5. The indication is that God casts, or sends, this sleep; it is a direct intervention of God. Aalders suggests that the sleep is therefore akin to anaesthesia.<sup>3</sup> The picture should not be carried too far. It is neither a hypnotic trance, nor an ecstatic state, the basic meaning is of a very sound sleep. This is confirmed by the use of the verb *WAYYYISHAN* to explain the man’s state during the creation of woman.

Various explanations are given of the phrase *'AHAT MISSAL 'OTAYN*, “one of his ribs”. This reference is the only place where the word clearly means “rib”. In other OT references the meaning is a more general reference to “side”. Aalders points out that God took one rib, and therefore it cannot mean anything but rib.<sup>4</sup> Leupold observes that rib does not simply mean bare bone, but also flesh.<sup>5</sup> The woman is not simply bone of his bone, but also flesh of his flesh. The word *BASAR*, flesh, signifies what is integral to Adam and his being and the woman is “flesh of his flesh”.

The significance of the formation of the woman from a rib is very clear and is discussed by Foh and Leupold. Foh makes the following points:

- 1) *Creation from the rib is part of woman’s corresponding-ness to the man.*
- 2) Creation of man is one act, starting with male and ending with female.
- 3) Adam is the representative before God, and all, including Eve, come from him.

- 4) The man and the woman become one flesh, which is to be later explained as the essence of marriage.
- 5) The difference in the creating process hints at the difference in the function of male and female.<sup>6</sup>

In v 22 the verb *BANA* which describes God's action in creating the woman is used when fashioning an important structure. He literally built a woman from the man's rib. The other verb which could have been used is *YASAR*, but this is applicable to material such as clay, and not to flesh. *BANA* is therefore a much superior concept.

The verb *BO'* is then repeated. As God brought the animals to the man, He now brings the woman to the man. God is superior to all His creatures. God not only forms the helper corresponding to man, He also presents her to the man.

### **The Man's Joy in the Woman (v 23)**

In Adam's speech he repeats the word *ZOT* three times. Leupold says this indicates a "certain animation" on Adam's part.<sup>7</sup> This is probably understating the case. The man immediately recognises the woman, and her nature, and is filled with excitement as well as joy.

This same thought is emphasised by the use of the word *HAPA'PM*. Here it has reference to an occurrence in time, "at last". It indicates that something was anticipated, and that Adam now finds what he previously lacked.

Adam then proceeds to name the woman. The Hebrew words for man and woman are very similar, *'ISH* and *'ISHSHA*. This has led some to suggest that *'ISHSHA* is the word for man, with a feminine suffix. However it is difficult to determine the etymology of both words. The names are similar but this may only convey the fact that Adam understands that the woman is taken from man, and corresponds to the man.

### **A Practical Application (v 24)**

This verse begins with the phrase *'AL-KEN*, usually translated as "therefore". Some suggest that it could be translated as "that is why". The translation of these words is bound up with the debate as to who actually spoke these words. If the phrase is translated as "that is why", it appears to be an antecedent explanation and would suggest this was not apparent to Adam. If it is translated as "therefore", meaning "for this reason", it suggests that Adam himself already understood the nature of marriage, in terms of leaving the parental home.

The Hebrew word *'AZAB* is sometimes translated as "forsake", but this may be too strong. The sense of the word is not "to forget", but simply to move away from the parental home. Kidner suggests that it emphasises the exclusive nature of marriage.<sup>8</sup> The word *DABAQ* signifies that this arrangement was to be permanent.

This thought of the permanence of marriage is strengthened by the phrase *LEBASAR 'EHAD*. This does not simply refer to flesh but the combination of two human beings into one unit, to "form a new cell in the social, economic, juridical, political, cultural (etc!) community."<sup>9</sup> There was only one man and one woman, and these two become one flesh. God's numerics for marriage are very clear. Adultery is therefore seen as a severing of this body, and is consequently viewed in Scripture as a form of murder.

But who spoke these words, Adam or Moses? If Adam spoke these words, then they are prophetic, because he would not have any understanding of parenthood, of leaving home to cleave to a wife, and establishing a new home. If Moses wrote these words, then the

verse is a parenthesis. It is always dangerous to assert what Adam may or may not have known in his state of innocence.

Murray is of the opinion that Adam spoke these words because, firstly, there is a natural sequence of thought from v 23 to v24, and, secondly, the inference of v 24 is integrally related to v 23. Even if Moses wrote these words Adam may still have understood the principle outlined in v 24. Jesus in Matt 19:8 implies that Adam knew this truth, since it was “known from the beginning”.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Intimate Harmony of the First Marriage (v 25)**

Both the man and his wife were *ARUMMIM*, “naked”. This does not imply any destitution, it simply means that they were not concealed from each other.

The verb *BOSH*, translated as “shame” is unusual. It is 3rd Plural, Imperfect. The verb has a hollow root, and so the Hithpolel is used. This is normally translated in a reflexive sense. However, Aalders points out that a reflexive sense implies a moral shortcoming in the couple, and since there was no sin, they could not be aware of this.<sup>11</sup>

The Hithpolel is a variant of the Hithpael. This form of the verb can express a reciprocal action, hence the translation, “they felt no shame before each other”. It can also be a declarative reflexive, pointing to self-esteem.<sup>12</sup> As God declares His greatness and displays His holiness, grounded on His self-esteem, so Adam and Eve esteemed one another with no shame. The phrase is therefore a simple declaration of the fact of innocency. There was a state of perfect harmony.

The unashamed simplicity of this concluding statement stands in the boldest contrast with the words which immediately follow, “Now the serpent was more crafty . . .” A detailed exegesis of Genesis 3 shows how sin disfigures the beauty of the relationship between God, the man and the woman.

### **References**

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- 7 Leupold, p 135
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- 9 Blocher, p 106
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- 11 Aalders, p 97
- 12 Bruce K Walkte and M O'Connor, *INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HEBREW SYNTAX*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990, p 424f, esp p 430-1

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